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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK IMMEDIATE  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002506

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2026  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: NO APPARENT INTENT -- NOW -- FOR TURKISH  
CROSS-BORDER OPERATION

REF: A. ANKARA 2449 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. TDX-315/31041-06  
[1](#)C. TDX-315/30826-06

Classified By: Ambassador Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: We continue to see no evidence of Turkish cross-border activity across the northern Iraq border. A senior staff general told us May 3 that two developments would almost certainly precipitate a cross-border operation (CBO): a spectacular attack in Turkey or an attack against Turkish troops stationed in northern Iraq. We assess that Turkey's likely intent is to give the new Iraqi government a chance to deal with the PKK issue. Absent this, the pressure to carry out a CBO will grow, unless there is a visible end to PKK violence and planning activities. Recent national technical means analysis indicates that close to 11,000 Turkish troops are within 10 kilometers of the Iraq border, with the total number of troops in the two provinces on this border at about 31,000. End summary.

By the Numbers  
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[1](#)2. (S/NF) Timely national technical means analysis indicates that only about 10,800 Turkish troops are deployed within 10 kilometers of the Iraqi border. The total number of troops (Army plus Jandarma) in the two provinces which border Iraq (Sirnak and Hakkari) comes to approximately 31,600. The overwhelming majority of these forces are dismounted (i.e., non-mechanized) infantry and Jandarma. Many of the troops are likely assigned to the task of protecting the border from PKK infiltration; they would be watching key transportation routes, villages, and other venues the PKK may use. Beyond what we reported ref a, we have no evidence of the transfer of significant troops, heavy equipment, or airborne assets to the southeast.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) To put the Turkish presence in the southeast into further context: We reported ref a that the total number of troops in the eastern half of Turkey (Jandarma plus Army) comes to approximately 200,000. To break it down further, the Second Army's area of responsibility (AOR) is the

southeast of Turkey -- it runs in an arc from Adana to just north of Malatya and then more or less in a straight line east all the way to the Iranian border. North of this is the Third Army's AOR, which still includes a number of PKK hot spots, such as Bingol. Third Army has no contact with the Iraq border, only Second Army does.

¶4. (S/NF) The total number of Jandarma troops for Sirnak and Hakkari is about 20,000. Second Army's typical strength is approximately 85,000, but apparently its 20th Armor Brigade is currently elsewhere, dropping its strength to about 70,000. Together with the Jandarma in Second Army's AOR beyond Sirnak and Hakkari, we estimate total troop strength to be approximately 100,000. This would mean that out of about 100,000 troops in the southeast, 68,000 are well away from the Iraqi border.

TGS Thinking: No Cross-Border Operation (Now)  
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¶5. (S/NF) Turkish General Staff (TGS) J2 LTG Aslan Guner provided further insight into Turkish thinking May 3 (see USDAO Ankara septel IIR). He emphasized the same points Turkish military and civilian leaders have said to the press (see ref a): Turkish troop movements toward the border are intended to prevent PKK infiltration, and these activities are the norm to deal with increased PKK movements and activities during the warmer months -- from March or April through November or December, depending on the weather.

¶6. (S/NF) Guner indicated that Turkey does not/not plan to carry out a cross-border operation (CBO), but acknowledged that many younger officers and even some in the senior ranks

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were pressing to go ahead. He allowed that if PKK attacks continue, TGS may say, "enough." Further, Guner indicated that two events would almost certainly precipitate a CBO: a mass casualty PKK attack in Turkey or an attack against the 1500 Turkish troops stationed in northern Iraq (carried out in order to "save" them).

¶7. (S/NF) The general said that Turkey is waiting for the formation of the new Iraqi government in order to initiate serious discussions on dealing with the PKK. He implied that absent some Iraqi (or U.S.) action, Turkey will suggest its own CBO to deal with the problem, in consultation with both the USG and GOI. We stressed to Guner that the U.S. opposes any CBO and puts priority on working cooperatively among Turkey, Iraq, and the U.S. on this issue, including through our established tripartite mechanism.

TGS: No Collaboration with Iran  
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¶8. (S/NF) Guner strongly denied any coordination or collaboration between Iranian and Turkish forces on the PKK. Guner noted with disdain that "the government" (i.e., the ruling AKP) has relations with Iran; the military does not. He asserted that Iran has asked if its CHOD and his counterpart could visit Turkey; TGS rebuffed both requests. (NOTE: However, we understand from other sources that Iranian and Turkish commanders near the border do meet in order to deconflict activities, such as counterinsurgency operations, each country carries out near their mutual border and where Iraq, Iran, and Turkey meet. END NOTE.) Guner noted that the 50 or so PKK terrorists Iran recently turned over to Turkey were interrogated and released -- they had no blood on their hands and proved to be of no intelligence value. Two recent intelligence reports closely match Guner's comments (refs b and c).

Intent Is the Issue  
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¶9. (S/NF) Turkey -- which has the second-largest military in

NATO -- has long stationed significant forces and firepower in the southeast, not only to deter Iran, Iraq, and Syria but to deal with the twenty year-old PKK threat. It launched significant counter-PKK CBOs in northern Iraq on two occasions during the 1990s. With 100,000 troops more or less permanently stationed in the southeast -- including significant Special Forces, air, and artillery assets -- Turkey already has at its disposal sufficient resources to carry out any kind of CBO, from the large-scale, long-term operations of the 1990s to what we surmise would be a somewhat more likely scenario of a short, surgical operation using primarily Special Forces. We believe TGS would likely see this option as the least damaging to Iraq's sovereignty, less likely to draw Turkey into a fight with KDP peshmerga, and likely to draw a less negative reaction from Iraq, the U.S., the EU, and other countries in the region.

¶10. (S/NF) The real issue is not capability, but intent. For now, we have no evidence that Turkey intends to carry out a CBO. In fact the Turkish military has taken a consistent line against a CBO in the press, privately with us, and apparently within the government. However, the two items Guner identified as triggers -- a spectacular attack in Turkey or an attack against Turkish troops in Iraq -- are all concrete possibilities. PKK violence in Turkey is more likely to continue than not and, as Guner warned, Turkish patience with it could run out. For now, Turkey appears to be willing to give the new Iraqi government a chance to take the issue seriously. Failure to do so will only increase the pressure to cross the border in force.

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WILSON